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Qualitative Measures of and Guidance for Navy Inclusiveness

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NPS NRP Executive Summary

Qualitative Measures of and Guidance for Navy Inclusiveness

Report Date: 30/6/2018 Project Number (IREF ID): NPS-18-N068-A

Naval Postgraduate School / School: MOVES



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QUALITATIVE MEASURES OF AND GUIDANCE FOR NAVY INCLUSIVENESS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Summary

This project undertook a deep dive investigation into the nature of the challenges involved in *nontrivially* transforming the existing Navy culture so as to become more ‘inclusive’.

The envisioned Navy organizational transformation, towards greater ‘inclusiveness’, has been promoted as yielding a variety of beneficial organizational effects ranging over: the elimination of irrational and detrimental discriminatory behavior; improved personnel retention rates; enhanced organizational innovation capabilities; and elevated operational effectiveness and readiness. In short, enhanced organizational ‘inclusiveness’ has been cast as a panacea for all that can ail an organization.

While a popular perception persists of the post-World War II Department of Defense (DoD)/United States Navy (USN) as playing an exemplar role in integrating the growing cultural/identity diversity of the American people into an effective war-fighting capability, more recently a sense that more needs to be done has emerged.

But despite considerable recent efforts within the Navy/DoD (as well as the federal government and the commercial sectors) to *institute* more inclusive organizations, this study found that the notions themselves, regarding what constitutes an ‘inclusive’ organization/culture, are effectively operationally undefined. This failure, to clearly articulate the intended meaning of these concepts, and consequently the inability to meaningfully measure them, has effectively thwarted all meaningful attempts at making pragmatic progress in this direction.

An analysis of the New Inclusion Quotient (NewIQ) factor of the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) as well as the ‘Inclusion at Work’ component of the DoD Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) found these surveys, in particular, to provide little meaningful indication of the inclusive status of surveyed organizations. Consequently this study undertook a systematic deconstruction of the dominant ‘Diversity & Inclusion’ community’s notions of ‘inclusiveness’, and its anticipated dividends, to eventually reveal a suite of underlying and unexamined assumptions that, when more carefully examined, reveal a promise of dividends that are unlikely to be fulfilled without both a substantial recharacterization of what we mean by ‘inclusiveness’ *along with* a broad Navy culture transformation, more attuned to the rapid changes brought about by the information age.

A new, more ‘inclusive’ supportive, ‘21st Century Navy’ culture is characterized in this 100+ page report that is founded less on the traditional values of ‘heroic sacrifice’ and more on the ‘embrace of uncertainty and adaptability’.

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A suite of cross-validating measures is recommended that rely less on the member's *subjective* and personal assessments of the organization's inclusiveness and more on objective measures directly tied to the presence of the organizational properties being sought.

Recommendations are provided for how such a cultural transformation might be ushered in via a combination of modified recruitment training and a leadership led/championed Continuous Improvement Process program.

Keywords: *Navy inclusion, diversity management, retention, innovation, organizational effectiveness, cultural transformation, equal opportunity, adaptability, resilience*

Background

The United States department of Defense (U.S. DoD) and the United States Navy (USN) have long been challenged by the task of integrating a culturally and social diverse workforce into a cohesive and effective fighting force.

In part this diversity integration challenge is being driven by larger federal government initiatives (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018) concerned with ensuring that equal opportunities are available to federal workers who possess social identities which are, or have been, subjected to systematic discrimination. And, in part, it is being driven by the fact that today's Navy recruits, independent of any external pressures to avoid discriminatory practices, simply come from increasingly diverse backgrounds.

While integrating a workforce of diverse cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds into a highly effective, committed and disciplined fighting force can be a challenge, that very diversity has also promised enhanced organizational innovation capabilities if it can be successfully leveraged.

However, some recent evidence of discriminatory behavior, e.g., (Ziezulewicz, 2017), in both recruitment and in promotion, has raised a question of whether the existing anti-discrimination practices, primarily predicated on instituting a purely objective 'merit based' system, are serving us as well in the current information age (where information is ubiquitous, change is rapid, and uncertainty endemic) as they did in the industrial age when they were first formulated.

A nuance in our existing strategy for measuring and managing our embrace of diversity, (primarily focused on proportionally reflecting, within the Navy, the general population's distribution of disparaged identity groups), has recently been articulated. That new strategy has been labeled 'inclusion'.

The hope and dream driving the *inclusion* strategy is that if we can create a more 'inclusive' Navy culture, then the historical challenges inherent in the attempt to integrate a culturally and socially diverse

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workforce might not only be ameliorated but converted into an organizational asset that yields enhanced loyalty (retention), innovation, *and* operational effectiveness.

Though that concept has wide-spread intuitive appeal, a measurable and consequently managable meaning of an inclusive culture/organization has heretofore defied articulation, for reasons that simply weren't obvious.

This study was commissioned in an attempt to identify the *obstacles* to operationalizing the meaning of an *inclusive* Navy culture and, if possible, to *define* a measurable operationalization that, importantly, would yield the promised benefits of: enhanced personnel retention, improved organizational innovation, and upgraded operational effectiveness to the USN, operating in its unique mission environment.

Finally, if such a meaningful operationalization could be defined, the study was tasked to make recommendations as the nature of programs that could be instituted within the Navy that would facilitate the transformation towards a more 'inclusive' Navy.

Findings and Conclusions

Seven primary findings, ranging from problem clarification to proposed solution, resulted from this study. Each of these is summarized below:

1. Current measures of organizational 'inclusiveness' have limited utility.

A review of the standard processes utilized to measure the current inclusiveness status of Navy organizations and to track their progress over time and/or to compare distinct organizations was revealed to be largely based on surveys of the members of the various organizations.

Standardized surveys such as the NewIQ (annually administered to federal employees) and the 'Inclusion at Work' (occasionally administered to DoD personnel) were found to be the primary basis for existing organizational inclusiveness assessments.

These existing surveys methods were found to be deeply flawed in their capacity to serve their intended measurement function. These problems were revealed to reside in not only serious but remediable methodological issues (primarily involving uncontrolled exogenous influences) but in the assumption that 'organizational inclusiveness' *can* be reliably assessed through constituent member's evaluation of how valued they feel they are to their organization vis-à-vis other members and/or other organizations.

Feeling 'included' (versus 'excluded') was found to reflect, in these surveys, little more than the assessment, of each member, of their value to the organization relative to other members of the organization. As such these surveys are seen to primarily reflect a zero-sum game where intra-organizational and inter-organizational variability are seen to be largely attributable to exogenous factors.

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2. Current definitions of inclusiveness are primarily relativistically defined.

At the core of existing definitions of Navy inclusiveness is fundamentally the notion of fairness in one of several forms. At first glance predicating organizational inclusiveness on fairness seems like a reasonable construct.

But a deconstruction of what the Navy means by fairness reveals a network of interrelated challenges in linking a sense of fairness to a sense of inclusion for an organization that operates in the context of limited resources and unpredictable complexity.

The problem essentially boils down to this: The current USN most highly values those of its members who are most willing (i.e., at a cost to their own personal interests) and capable (i.e., physically and cognitively) of serving/supporting the Navy Mission. This 'merit' based assessment of 'value to the Navy' defines, for the Navy, which of its members it truly most highly values and will consequently 'sacrifice' to retain.

The consequent subtle competition, amongst the membership, to define and defend one's 'nobility' (i.e., willingness to sacrifice self-interest) precipitates a difficult (but not impossible) environment in which to make *all* Sailors feel *more* included.

What pragmatically makes the objective of making *all* Sailors feel *more* included is the unpredictability of the requirements placed on and resources provided to the Navy. This unavoidable uncertainty makes even the sense of feeling included as in 'knowing the rules of the game' beyond the reach of the Navy.

3. The changes wrought by the Information Age challenge our traditional notion of inclusion.

Compounding the inclusion problem characterized above is that the Navy's operational environment has, in recent decades, changed. The relatively stable industrial age threat environment has yielded to a much more dynamic *information age* threat environment.

The Information Age environment is characterized by much higher levels of uncertainty and unpredictable in the scale, locus, and strategic focus of external threats and opportunities. Even more challenging is that the internal structure/dynamics of encountered threats (i.e., 'engineered' vs. 'swarming') is not only less predictable but more dynamic.

The result of the emergence of this much more dynamically evolving threat environment is that the role played by the much revered and disciplined *reliability*, at the heart of the Navy's Core Values, in defining who are was securely included and who was not, began to lose its pragmatic utility.

The value in disciplined and self-sacrificing *reliability* is increasingly finding itself in conflict with the multi-scale need to effectively 'innovate' in order to effectively engage the encountered threat.

4. Sensemaking crisis serve as a critical test of organizational inclusiveness.

Nowhere is an organization's capacity to maintain a sense of inclusiveness more sorely tested than in the context of an encounter with a time-sensitive threat that can't be readily comprehended. These sensemaking crises can and often do precipitate severe losses in confidence in the collectively understood plan. And all too readily that loss of confidence, in 'the plan', can trigger an avalanche of lost trust relations, senses of betrayal, and a consequent lingering sense of diminished inclusion.

Recent research has revealed a leading trigger of such sensemaking crises as involving external contexts that require the organization to switch from being 'end oriented' to being 'means oriented' (and/or its reciprocal). These rivalrous (ethical) frameworks (employed to evaluate the organizational felicity of individual actions) are not only mutually incompatible but largely mutually incomprehensible. (Each also defines its own distinct sense of 'nobility'.)

Organizations that are 'emotionally' committed to a specific 'ethical style' of organizing are particularly challenged when their threat/opportunity environment calls upon them to switch styles. Particularly non-adaptive organizations often simply fail to make the adjustment and have been shown to effectively fractionate in a cascading and progressive sense of inclusion loss along with a concomitant, sometimes permanent, loss of organizational effectiveness and innovation.

5. Successfully navigating a sensemaking crisis requires a cultural shift from *nobility* to *adaptability*.

For the Navy to more effectively cope with these critical and increasingly common sensemaking crises will require a cultural shift from its current focus on 'nobility' to one focused on more saliently on 'adaptability'.

The change is not trivial but it is required if the 21st Century Navy of the Information Age is to remain the premier fighting force that it is today.

Foundational to the required Navy cultural change is the need to institute a capacity to be comfortable with uncertainty amongst all Sailors. This embrace of uncertainty, even in the context of collective action, requires the acquisition of a disciplined capacity to suppress more 'instinctual' responses to uncertainty. Yet it is this collective capacity to tolerate uncertainty that lies at the heart of an adaptive organizational capacity to endure the 'identity transforming' consequences of sensemaking crises. Maintaining the dual roles of 'mentor' and 'hero' as described in Campbell's description of the monomyth is provided as a template for the objective Navy Sailor's 'sacred' narrative.

6. Objective measures of social network structure/dynamics are preferred for measuring inclusion.

Assessing the properties of an emergent (social) entity by asking the constituents, from whom these collective properties emerge, about them, has long been recognized as problematic.

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[It's a bit like trying to ask an ant about how the colony finds its food or a termite about how they build their mounds; they really don't know. All they really 'know' is that they respond to the pheromones in their environment ... (in fact, the very notion that food-gathering optimization or structured mound-building is even occurring is not something the individual ant/termite can cognize).]

The individual constituents of a social organization simply aren't in a privileged position to judge how effective their organization is in making *everyone* feel included ... even if they agreed on what the notion might mean (which they don't). *And*, even if organizational inclusion *could* be usefully/pragmatically represented as the mean value of some aggregated subjective assessment, the human need to feel included (i.e., to feel like we 'belong') is so strong that we humans rarely acknowledge that we don't rightfully belong (even when we've been outright outcast), i.e., 'denial' reigns supreme in this domain.

Fortunately, there are a number of tools at our disposal that can be used to *directly* assess and cross-validate these organizational properties without recourse to the subjective, limited, and biased opinions of the organizational membership.

The common feature of the five recommended assessment tools, described in the report, is that they all directly analyze the organization's social network structure and/or dynamics for signs of the adaptivity that we are looking for in a meaningfully inclusive organization.

Some of these tools look at the structural linkages between the various constituents (individuals and/or SIGs) and how they change in response to various stimuli. Others look at the form or content of the information flowing over these links. But their individual and collective efficacy in meaningfully assessing organizational 'inclusiveness' lies in abandoning the subjective survey approach in favor of a direct assessment of the collective social behavior in question.

7. Recruitment Training plus CIP programs offer promise in facilitating the required cultural changes.

The required Navy cultural changes that are recommended as crucial to the institutionalization of a meaningfully more inclusive Navy organization, capable of delivering the promised increase in loyalty/retention, innovation and effectiveness, require significant modification to the core values that we currently instill in our Sailors. Foremost amongst the required additions to the Navy's Core Values is a significant increase in the current emphasis on *adaptability*, especially in the context of *uncertainty*.

The critical elements of this 'adaptability' are delineated, and a hybrid organizational transformation program is defined consisting of recommended modifications to Recruit Training in conjunction with a leadership lead sustaining/enriching Continuous Improvement Program.

Recommendations for Further Research

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Further research is recommended to facilitate the recommended Navy organizational transformation. These recommendations fall into two natural kinds: validating the recommended metrics and establishing the efficacy of the enhancement initiatives.

Recommendations are made for funded research directed at refining and validating *each* of the five identified organizational inclusion metrics. Studies should be conducted to substantiate the relation between the refined inclusion metric and the promised organizational benefits (better retention, innovation and effectiveness). These studies are also expected to yield recommendations for conducting ‘first order’ organizational inclusion assessments in under-resourced (or time-constrained) Navy organizations.

Recommendations are also made for funded research directed at refining and establishing the efficacy of *each* of the four recommended adaptability enhancement methods. Particularly research should be conducted to establish both the immediate *and* longitudinal impacts of each of the interventions.

A particularly strong recommendation is made here to investigate the value of early (and sustained) ‘mindfulness/compassion’ in facilitating the intended transformation. Early indications of effectiveness, from even fairly limited exposure to these practices, in ameliorating the negative impacts of ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on adaptability provide particular promise in the context of our intent to create a more inclusive, loyal, innovative and effective Navy.

References

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Ziezulewicz, G. F. (2017, August). Despite changes, 13 Navy ratings are still 99 percent men. *Navy Times*.

Acronyms

DEOCS - DEOMI Organizational Climate Survey
DEOMI - Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute
DoD - Department of Defense
FEVS - Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey
NewIQ - New Inclusion Quotient
U.S. DoD - United States department of Defense
USN - United States Navy
ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences)
posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)